



Introduction to Jamaican Research

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Jamaica is the third largest island in the Caribbean and is the home to 2.9 million descendants of people from nations all over the world. This multi-cultural dynamic is reflected in their motto is "*Out of Many, One People.*"

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

The following timeline focuses on historical events that help trace the origins of Jamaicans from the time of European contact.

- **1494** – Columbus discovers Jamaica and native Taino people.
- **1509** – Spanish colonization. Taino population nearly annihilated due to slavery and disease. Spain compensates by importing slaves from Africa. Escaped slaves, called Maroons, establish separate communities. Portuguese Jews arrive to escape the Spanish Inquisition.
- **1655-1670** – Britain takes the island from Spain and call it Jamaica. The subsequent boom of the sugar plantations drastically increases the importation of slaves from Africa, as well as prisoners, vagrants and indentured servants from Ireland and Scotland.
- **1661** – Land records begin.
- **1674** – Inventories of estates begin for deceased persons and include non-real property.
- **1779** – Jamaican newspaper, The Royal Gazette, begins circulation.
- **1792** – Roman Catholic parish registers begin.
- **1795** – French refugees arrive from St. Domingue.
- **1795-96** – Maroon wars lead to exportation of many Maroons from Trelawney Town to Nova Scotia.
- **1807** – Britain abolishes slave trade, but not the institution of slavery.
- **1834** – Slavery outlawed. A system of apprenticeship established to employ former slaves.
- **1835** – Seaford Town established to become German settlement.
- **1838** – Full emancipation for all slaves resulting in labor shortage, increasing the influx of indentured servants.
- **1843** – Civil registration of births and deaths mandated but compliance was meager and mandate was revoked.
- **1845** – Workers from India arrive.
- **1846** – New tariff laws significantly reduce the price of sugar, resulting in abandoned plantations that were divided into lots and sold to peasants. Many residents emigrated in search of employment.
- **1854** – Workers from China arrive.
- **1865** – The Anglican Church dis-established as the state church.
- **1880** – Civil registration begins.
- **1962** – Jamaica gains independence, becomes a state in the Commonwealth of Nations.

JAMAICAN RECORDS ONLINE

FamilySearch

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/>

FamilySearch has digital images of civil registration records, some church records, notarial records, and wills. Other helpful resources include historical information, maps, gazetteers, and guided research help in the FamilySearch Research Wiki with links to relevant Jamaican research websites. Notable databases include:

Jamaica, Civil Registration, 1880-1999

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1538386>

Images of original birth, marriage, and death records created by civil registration offices in Jamaica. Not all of these records held by FamilySearch have been indexed. If a search of the indexes proves negative, the images can be browsed by going to the listing of parish records in the catalog.

Jamaica, Church of England Parish Register Transcripts, 1664-1880

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1827268>

Handwritten transcripts taken for Jamaican church registers. The indexing of these records is incomplete and it may be required to browse the film.

Caribbean Births and Baptisms, 1590-1928

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1804229>

How to find Jamaican Databases at FamilySearch.org:

1. Click on Search button located in the menu on the upper left of your screen.
2. Click **Catalog** from the sub menu at the top left of your screen. The FamilySearch catalog page will load.
3. To search by place, enter the parish, county, or country. For example, to find records for Kingston, begin typing **Kingston** in the search bar. A dropdown list will appear. Select **Jamaica, Kingston** and click **Search**. A page will load listing the record types that have catalog material for Kingston.
4. Click on the desired record type, for example, **civil registration**, to see the collections that exist in the catalog for that location.
5. Click on the title of the desired collection to see the complete catalog information and access the records.

Ancestry.com

<https://www.ancestry.com>

Ancestry.com has indexes of civil registration, some church records, church histories, as well as compiled passenger and emigrant lists. Notable databases include:

Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813-1834

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1129>

After the importation of slaves became illegal 1807, many Jamaican colonies began keeping slave registers to keep track of the slave population as a way to police illicit transportation.

Registration occurred every three years. This database contains the digitized images from about half of the parishes that kept the records. Other parish registers that have not been digitized can be found by researching in the British National Archives in Kew.

Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1775

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61074/>

More Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1775

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/49263>

A list of names transported to the American colonies and Caribbean islands compiled from passenger lists. Find the names of felons sentenced to transportation, the dates and places they were sentenced, the charges, and where they were sent in the colonies.

The Original Scots Colonists of Early America. Caribbean 1612-1783 / Supplement 1611-1707 / 1607-1707

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/48520>

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/48521>

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/48522>

A compiled list taken from court, parliament, shipping, and merchant records that name Scottish emigrants. Some of these left Scotland voluntarily as merchants, planters and seamen. However, the majority of Scottish emigrants were expelled felons, political undesirables, or indentured servants.

How to find Jamaican Databases at Ancestry.com:

1. Click on **Search** from the menu on the left side of the menu ribbon available on every Ancestry.com webpage.
2. Select the **Card Catalog** option.
3. For a list of available collection specific to Jamaica, type **Jamaica** in the **Keyword(s)** search bar. Then click the **Search** button.

OR

4. To access a specific collection, type the **title of the collection** in the **Title** search bar. Then click the **Search** button.
5. To see if the selected collection is available online, scroll down to the section titled **Film/Digital Notes**. In the **Format** column on the right, icons describe the availability of the record.

FindmyPast

<https://www.findmypast.com/>

FindmyPast has indexed images of original vital records. These record collections include Jamaica Births & Baptisms; Jamaica, Civil Death Registrations; and Jamaica, Civil Marriage Registrations. Vital records for British military personnel who served in Jamaica can be found in British Armed Forces and Overseas Births and Baptisms, British Armed Forces and Overseas Banns and Marriages, and British Armed Forces and Overseas Deaths and Burials. Also, a list of men who served in the British armed forces during World War I is found in their Caribbean Rolls Of Honour WW1 collection.

How to find Jamaican Databases at Findmypast.com:

1. Click on **Search** from the top menu bar. A dropdown list will appear.
2. Select the **All Record Sets** option on the top right of the dropdown list.
3. In the **Filter by** box on the left of the page, the enter **Jamaica** in the second search box and select Jamaica from the dropdown list. Collections specific to Jamaica will populate the box on the right.

OR

4. To access a specific collection, type the **title of the collection** in the **Title** search bar. Then click the **Search** button.

Legacies of British Slavery

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs>

When the British Parliament abolished slavery in 1834, a budget of £20 million was allocated to subsidize the plantation owners. By following these payments, all slave holders in the British colonies at this time are identified in the database. Continuing efforts are made to trace the activities of these slave holders and publish their information. Search this database for legacies, inventories, estates, maps and more.

Jamaican Family Search

<http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com>

Contains transcriptions of almanacs, wills, directories, land grants, gazetteers, and much more.

How to find information from records on Jamaican Family Search:

1. Enter the name of the person of interest in the search bar at the top of the Jamaican Family Search homepage. This generates a list of Query Results, which is records that contain the search terms.
2. Click on the blue link to see the record transcription.

OR

3. Scroll down the page to see the record types available. Click on the link to navigate to the desired record type. Enter the name of the person of interest in the search bar on the page.

JAMAICAN ARCHIVES

There are several repositories in Jamaica that hold records of genealogical value. These records have not been made available online. If in-person research is not possible, each archive offers a research service that provides access to needed documents.

Jamaica Archives and Records Department

<https://www.jard.gov.jm>

This is the official government archive holding. Research is open to the public and a research service if available by request. Holdings include administrative records such as inventories, crop

accounts, manumission of slaves, slave registers, and parish registers. Some church records have been deposited here, although many are still held privately. Many private records are also archived here such as correspondence, diaries, minute books, accounts, publications, photographs and estate journals, plans, deeds, and conveyances.

The National Library of Jamaica

<https://nlj.gov.jm/digital-collections>

The Library of Jamaica holds materials significant to genealogical research including biographies, photographs, newspapers, maps, manuscripts, and more.

Registrar General's Department

<https://www.rgd.gov.jm>

This is the place to order copies of more recent birth, marriage and death records.